

The Vitality of Javanese Language in a Multilingual Society in Solo, Central Java

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Abstract

This study investigates the introduction of Javanese language vitality in Solo, Central Java, a region celebrated for its linguistic diversity and cultural richness. A significant gap in literature exists in understanding the interplay of sociolinguistic factors such as age, gender, and education on language usage. In this regard, the study intends to assess the current situation with the languages of Solo and the factors that come into play in their preservation and passing on. In this case, the mixed tool included the method of interviewing 40 informants from various populations in order to collect data. Details indicate that domestic languages are mainly used in homes and informal contexts while the Indonesian language was used mostly in formal and public settings. Such developments which are said to be caused by the change of generations, education, and urbanization, highlight the tendency towards the heavy compartmentalization of language usage among generations. Major conclusions report the weakening of the generational shift paradigm and the global tourist trend as one of the stimulating factors for the shift of the language. The focus of the conclusion is on the role of local communities and authorities in implementation of such measures to maintain language diversity and sustain the cultural identity tied to mother tongues. By addressing these challenges, the study contributes to the broader discourse on language preservation in multilingual societies.

Keywords: *Language vitality; Mother tongues; Multilingualism; Sociolinguistics; Linguistic diversity; Language preservation strategies.*

1. Introduction

The vitality of mother tongues plays a crucial role in preserving cultural identity and heritage within multilingual communities. In regions like Solo, Central Java, where multiple languages coexist, understanding the dynamics of language use is essential for promoting linguistic diversity and preventing language extinction. This study aims to explore the vitality of local languages in this area, focusing on how factors such as gender, age, and



education influence language use patterns.

Previous research has highlighted the significance of language vitality in multilingual contexts. For instance, Fishman (1991) emphasized the importance of intergenerational language transmission as a key factor in maintaining language vitality. Similarly, Austin and Sallabank (2011) discussed the various dimensions of language endangerment and the need for effective strategies to support vulnerable languages. These studies provide a foundational understanding of the challenges faced by regional languages and inspire the current research.

The objectives of this study are twofold: first, to describe the current state of mother tongue vitality in the multilingual communities of Solo, and second, to identify the social factors that contribute to language use patterns among different demographic groups. By employing a sociolinguistic approach, this research seeks to fill gaps in existing literature regarding the vitality of regional languages in Indonesia. Following sections will discuss the methodology employed in this study, including the data collection process and analysis techniques. Additionally, the literature review will elaborate on the theoretical constructs that underpin the research, drawing from various journal articles and books that inform the analysis. Key works include Spolsky (1998), who explored the relationship between language and society, and Cohn et al. (2013), who provided insights into language use patterns in multilingual settings. The aim of the research is to describe the vitality of local languages in Solo, Central Java, focusing on how this vitality is influenced by factors such as gender, age, and education levels among the community members. The study seeks to understand the patterns of language use in various social domains and the impact of tourism and globalization on the local languages, particularly in a multilingual context.

Theoretical Framework

Human tendency to communicate and interact is not a phenomenon that emerges recently. These symptoms appear in line with the development of human civilization. Whether for the motive of developing power, politics, survival, and slavery; it has been a long time since humans are out of their closest social environment. This is what leads to the movement of people from one region to another, both in the form of individuals/families and in large waves.

Case Studies

This research is necessary to understand how these forces are impacting the vitality of Javanese in different social contexts, particularly within families, workplaces, and educational settings. By exploring factors like age, gender, and education levels, the study aims to highlight the patterns of language shift or maintenance in Solo. Additionally, the findings will provide a theoretical contribution to the discussion of language preservation strategies in multilingual urban areas. The need to conduct this research stems from the increasing concern that without intervention, Javanese, particularly in urban centers, may follow the path of other regional languages that are diminishing in use and at risk of extinction.

2. Method

This study mainly uses sociolinguistic theory to assist the method. Sociolinguistics is the study of language in relation to society (R.A. Huson, 1996). The social use of language extends to all phenomena that are the subject of sociolinguistic studies. The social use of language spreads into all phenomena that become the subject of sociolinguistic studies.

Furthermore, this descriptive study used a mixed method. Creswell (2009) emphasizes that mixed methods can be used to produce more comprehensive, complete, and superior answers and understanding. This study aims to describe the vitality of local languages in Solo, Central Java.

The data was collected from interviews conducted with 40 individuals who have different mother tongues. The study involved 17 male and 23 female participants. The informants consisted of 25 young and 15 older individuals. In terms of educational levels, 7 participants had a low education level and 33 participants had a high education level. Additionally, the diversity of the participants' backgrounds is related to variations in their mother tongue. The informants were speakers with the same mother tongue as Javanese with a total of 40 people, but some of the participants can master other languages that is Indonesia with a total of 36 people.

This study utilized the "Interview Package of Basa Urang," an instrument developed based on Cohn et al.'s work (2013, pp. 9-10). The instrument grouped language domains into five categories, following Greenfield's concept, which includes family, friendship, religion, education, and work (Fishman, 1972, p. 445). These five domains differentiate based on the interlocutor, setting, and the subject of conversation. Cohn et al. (2013, pp. 9-10) further divided language use patterns into three categories: patterns "for," patterns "in," and patterns "with." In this study, the primary data were categorized using these three types of language use.

This study was carried out in Solo, Central Java, an area popular for tourism. Observations have shown that the local Javanese-speaking people have been exposed to language contact with both domestic and foreign tourists. The research method followed the flow outlined by Miles and Huberman (1984), which includes six stages: (1) selecting the research topic, (2) collecting data, (3) reducing data, (4) classifying data, (5) presenting data, and (6) drawing conclusions. The data collection process involved the researchers' recording and interview techniques.

3. Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the critical role of mother tongues in maintaining cultural identity within the multilingual context of Solo, Central Java. The data reveals a nuanced landscape where Javanese, while still prevalent in familial and informal settings, faces significant challenges in public and educational domains. This trend reflects broader sociolinguistic dynamics observed in multilingual societies, where dominant languages often overshadow regional dialects due to globalization and urbanization pressures.

The analysis highlights that Javanese is predominantly used among family members and during intimate interactions, aligning with Fishman's (1991) assertion regarding the importance of intergenerational language transmission for sustaining linguistic vitality. However, the shift towards Indonesian, especially among younger generations, indicates a worrying trend of language erosion. This phenomenon can be linked to the increased prestige associated with Indonesian as the national language and its dominance in educational settings (Rahmawati et al., 2022). The findings resonate with research by Firman et al. (2023), which documented similar patterns of language shift among regional languages in Indonesia.

The study also reveals significant gender and age disparities in language use. Male informants exhibit a slightly higher tendency to use Javanese on social media compared to females, who favor Indonesian. This aligns with previous research indicating that gender influences language choice and usage patterns (Cargile et al., 1994). Furthermore, the generational divide is evident; younger informants show a preference for Indonesian in both formal and informal contexts, highlighting a critical area for intervention to ensure the transmission of local languages (Ibrahim et al., 2020).

Education emerges as a pivotal factor influencing language vitality. The predominance of Indonesian in educational settings diminishes opportunities for Javanese usage among youth, echoing findings from Sobarna (2007) that emphasize the role of formal education in language maintenance. Additionally, the impact of tourism cannot be overlooked; as Solo attracts visitors, the necessity for communication in Indonesian or English often leads to a reduction in local language use (Arka, 2013). This trend necessitates strategic community engagement to promote local languages within tourist interactions.

To combat these trends, it is essential to implement comprehensive strategies aimed at revitalizing mother tongues. Community initiatives that encourage the use of Javanese in various domains such as schools, cultural events, and social media can foster positive attitudes towards local languages (Austin & Sallabank, 2011). Policymakers should prioritize language preservation efforts by integrating local languages into educational curricula and public life.

Gender

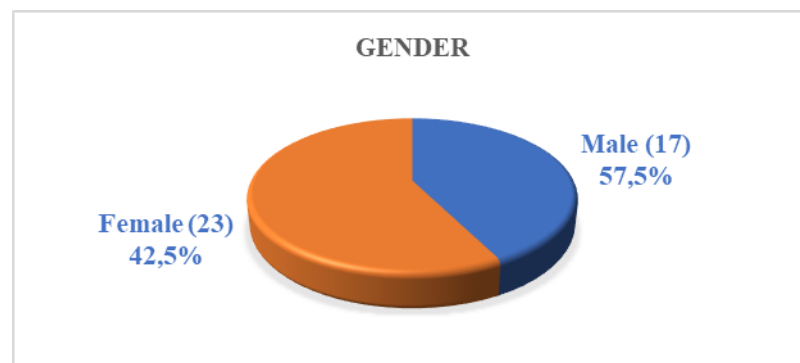


Figure 1. Gender

As shown in Figure 1. Gender; the data presents the demographic breakdown of the participants involved in the study, focusing specifically on gender distribution among the interviewees. The data was collected from a total of 40 individuals, which included:

- Male Participants: 17 individuals, representing 42.5% of the total sample.
- Female Participants: 23 individuals, accounting for 57.5% of the total sample.

This gender distribution indicates a slightly higher representation of female participants. The implications of this demographic detail are significant for understanding language use patterns within the multilingual context of Solo, Central Java. This observation aligns with existing sociolinguistic research that suggests gender influences language choice and usage. The figure not only serves to illustrate the gender composition of the sample but also sets the stage for analyzing how these differences might affect language dynamics in familial and social contexts. By having a more balanced representation of genders, the study can better assess how cultural and social factors influence language maintenance and shift among different demographics.

Pattern “With” based on Gender Differences

Based on the results of the analysis of the vitality of the mother tongue using the pattern “with”, speakers significantly use the mother tongue in the family domain and their daily life. The vitality of the mother tongue in the family domain by gender can be seen below.

Pattern “With” of Male Informant

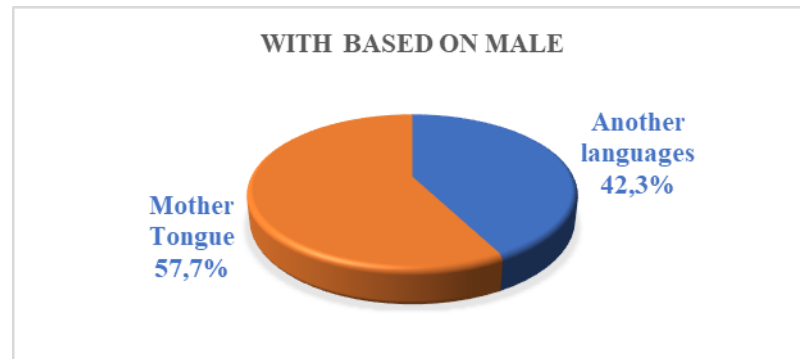


Figure 2 . Pattern “ with” of male informant

Based on Figure 2. Pattern “ with” of male informants; a total of 15 informants or 57.7% of male informants use their regional language or mother tongue in their daily lives with their families. Informants who use regional languages in their daily lives with their families are Javanese. Informants who use Javanese in their daily lives have a low educational background equivalent to elementary school and junior high school, their jobs are also the reason why they use Javanese in their daily lives which only meet with fellow local people.

A total of 2 informants or 42.3% of male informants use other languages in their daily lives with their families. Informants who use other languages in their daily lives with their families are Indonesian. The use of Indonesian as a daily language is influenced by their educational background, namely high school and even at college level, they feel better using Indonesian because they also often meet and communicate with people from other cities, their jobs that require them to speak using Indonesian are the reasons why they use Indonesian in their daily lives.

Pattern “With” of Female Informant

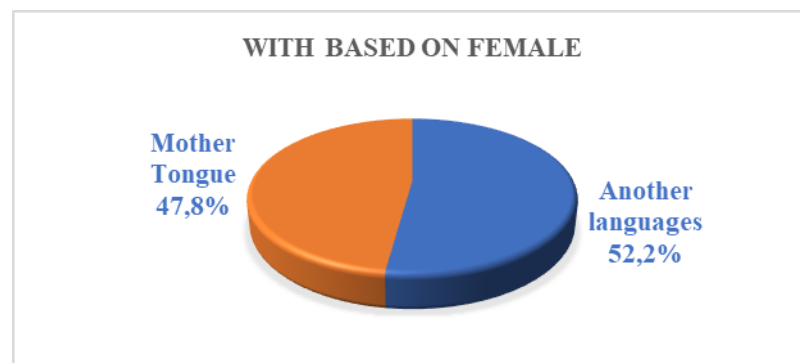


Figure 3 . Pattern “with” of female informant

As shown in Figure 3. Pattern “with” of female informants, a total of 11 informants or 47.8% of female informants use another language, Indonesian, in their families and daily lives. The use of Indonesian as an everyday language is partly motivated by the background of parents who come from other cities which is the reason their parents speak Indonesian as their mother tongue.

A total of 12 informants or 52.2% of female informants use their regional language or mother tongue, Javanese, in their families and daily lives. The use of Javanese as an everyday language is partly motivated by the inheritance of regional languages in the family realm which is still quite good. In addition to being used in the family and daily life, Javanese is used in relationships with neighbors, coworkers, and peers.

Pattern “For” based on Gender Differences using Social Media

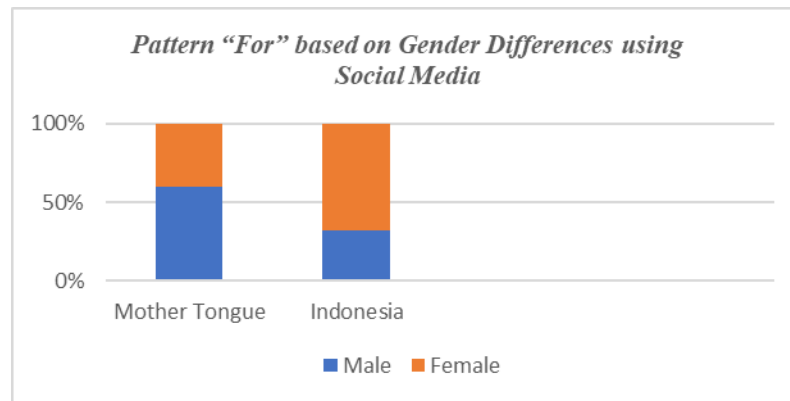


Figure 4. Pattern “for” based on gender differences using social media

Table 1. Language use by gender; pattern “for”

Language	Males		Females	
	E	%	E	%
Mother Tongue	6	60	4	40
Indonesian	9	32,1	19	67,9

As shown in Figure 4. Pattern “for” based on gender differences using social media and table 1. language use by gender; pattern “for”; the data indicates that male speakers are more likely to use their mother tongue, Javanese language, in social media communications while females are more likely to use the Indonesian language in their social media communications.

- Mother tongue (Javanese language): 60% of males use their mother tongue in their social media communications while 40% of females use their Mother Tongue.
- Indonesian: 32.1% of males use Indonesian in their social media communications while 67.9% of females use Indonesian.

Age

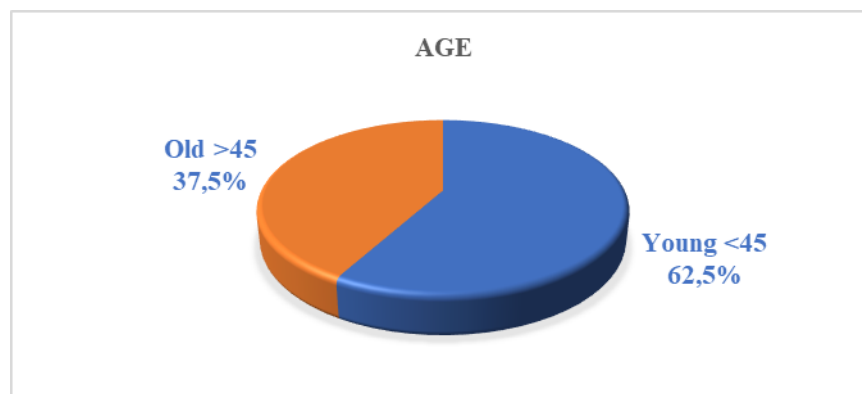


Figure 5 . Pattern “for” based on age differences

As shown in Figure 5 . Pattern “for” based on age differences, the data was collected from interviews conducted with 40 people who have different mother tongues. The informants consisted of 25 or 62.5% young people (under 45 years old) and 18 or 37.5% old people (over 45 years old). Language use is supported by educational and work backgrounds with different social contexts.

Pattern “With” based on Age Differences

Based on the analysis of the vitality of the mother tongue using the pattern “with”, speakers significantly use the mother tongue to communicate with older and younger speakers. The vitality of the mother tongue by age can be seen below.

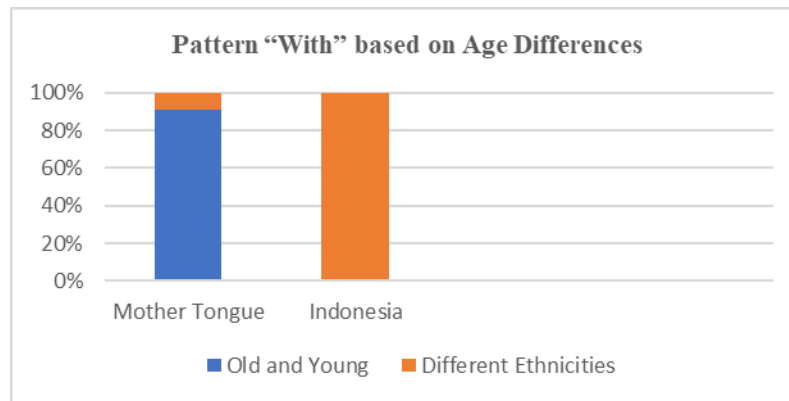


Figure 6. Pattern “with” based on age differences

Table 2. Language use in different social context; pattern “with”

Language	Old and Young Interlocutors		Interlocutors of Different Ethnic	
	E	%	E	%
Mother Tongue	40	90,9	4	9,1
Indonesian	0	0	36	100

As shown in Figure 6. Pattern “with” based on age differences and table 2. language use in different social contexts; pattern “with”; the chart shows the use of "mother tongue" and "Indonesian" when the speakers are of the same age (old and young) and when the speakers are from different ethnic groups (different ethnic groups). When the interlocutors are the same age, the mother tongue/Javanese is used in 90.9% of cases, while Indonesian is used in 0% of cases. The use of Javanese is based on the speakers still preserving Javanese and their jobs do not require the use of other languages. When the interlocutors are of different ethnicities, the mother tongue/Javanese is used in 9.1% of cases, while Indonesian is used in 100% of cases. The use of different languages is due to differences in the people they are talking to and the language they have been taught since birth, namely Indonesian, some of them use Javanese, the use of Indonesian is greater because parents come from other cities or parents choose Indonesian because it is easier to teach. This is because Indonesian only has formal and informal levels, in contrast to Javanese which has more complex language levels such as *krama madya*, *krama inggil*, and *ngoko*.

Pattern “For” based on Age Differences in Prayer

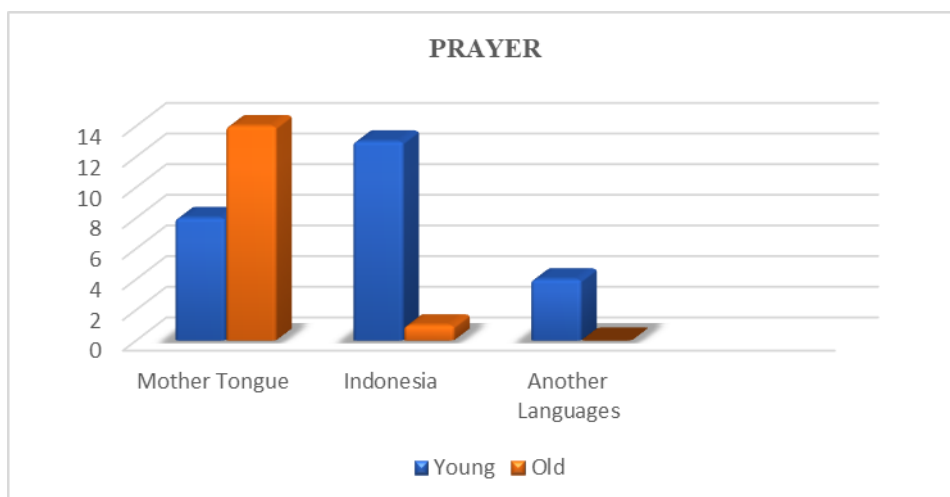


Figure 7. Pattern “for” based on age differences in prayer

Based on Figure 7. Pattern “for” based on age differences in prayer, both in the heart and places of worship, the use of mother tongue/Javanese and Indonesian is widely used by informants because it is easier to understand what they say than other languages such as Arabic for Islam or foreign languages for other religions where only a few people know the meaning of the language.

Pattern “For” based on Age Differences in using Social Media

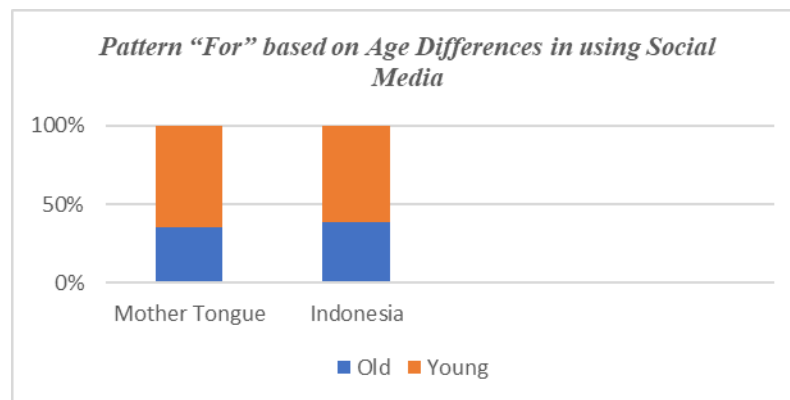


Figure 8. Pattern “for” based on age differences in using social media

Table 3. Language use by age in using social media; pattern “for”

Language	Old Interlocutors		Young Interlocutors	
	E	%	E	%
Mother Tongue	5	37,5	9	64,3
Indonesian	10	38,5	16	61,5

As shown in Figure 8. Pattern “for” based on age differences in using social media and table 3. Language use by age in using social media; pattern “for”, from a comprehensive comparison, the percentage of Indonesian language use on social media by younger informants tends to be higher than older informants. Older informants tend to use social media less, they only use SMS or WA to communicate simply, they find it easier to use their mother tongue/Javanese language in communicating on social media. The use of social media for young informants is more on online platforms that also use more Indonesian, this triggers a higher use of Indonesian compared to older informants.

Pattern “In” based on Age Differences in Public Settings

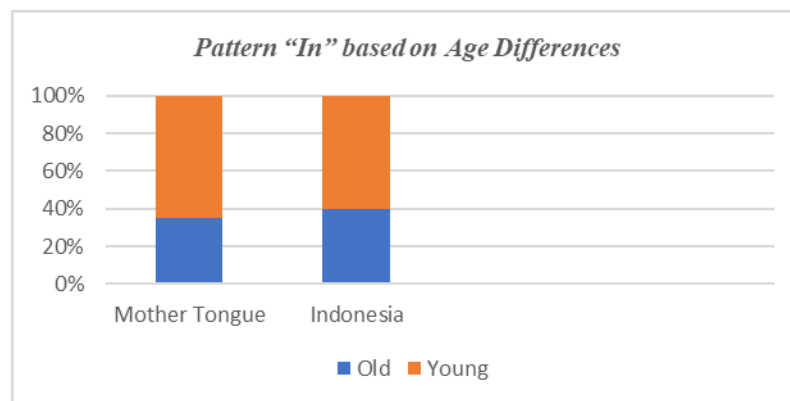


Figure 9. Pattern “in” based on age differences in public settings

Table 4. Language use by age; pattern “in”

Language	Old Interlocutors		Young Interlocutors	
	E	%	E	%
Mother Tongue	7	35	13	65
Indonesian	8	40	12	60

As shown in Figure 9. Pattern “in” based on age differences in public settings and table 4. language use by age; pattern “in”, Both older and younger informants used their mother tongue/Javanese language less and less to communicate in various contexts, indicating a gradual shift towards other languages (Indonesian, English, and other foreign languages). As many as 35% of older informants and 65% of younger informants used Javanese mainly in family and public

environments (e.g., home and market). In contrast, 60% of younger informants and 40% of older informants used other languages (Indonesian, English, and other foreign languages) more often in home, public (e.g., home and market), and educational environments because learning activities also use Indonesian. The background of language use is influenced by different social contexts, and who they meet is also a reason for language use.

Pattern “In” based on Age Differences in Work

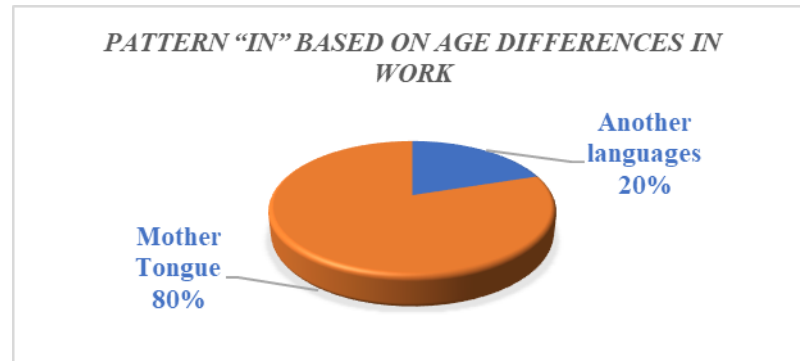


Figure 10. Pattern “in” based on age differences in work

Table 5. Language use by age in work; pattern “in”

Language	Old Interlocutors	Young Interlocutors
	E	E
Mother Tongue	12	4
Another Language	3	19

As shown in Figure 10. Pattern “in” based on age differences in work and table 5. language use by age in work; pattern “in”, mother tongue/Javanese language is predominantly used by old informants (12 informants) compared to young informants (4 informants). Another Language is more prevalent among young informants (19 informants) than old informants (3 informants). Older informants showed a strong preference for using mother tongue/Javanese language at work (80%) because their jobs do not require the use of other languages, most of them are traders/entrepreneurs and *becak* drivers, they also only meet local people, this causes the use of Javanese to be better than other languages at work. Younger informants showed a tendency towards the use of more diverse languages (20%). The jobs carried out by young people are more varied, such as security guards, drivers, selling (boutiques, clothes, souvenirs) in shops, and students, they have a high intensity in meeting people from outside the city and even foreigners, they know that languages other than Javanese such as Indonesian, English are very much needed in the future, some of them even learn French and Arabic.

4. Conclusion

This study provides insight into the complex relationships affecting the health of Javanese in a multilingual culture, specifically Solo Javanese. Although Javanese is still widely used in social and familial contexts, especially among older generations, younger generations use Indonesian more frequently, especially in formal settings such as the workplace, education, and online communication. The interaction of variables such as age, gender, and education level strongly influences language use patterns. The younger generation and those with higher education tend to lean more towards Indonesian, while the older generation and those with lower education show stronger allegiance to the mother tongue. As a reflection of more considerable social changes, gender differences also show different levels of adaptation in language choice. These findings underscore the importance of targeted language preservation strategies to address the ongoing functional compartmentalization of Solo Javanese and to foster its continued relevance across generations and social contexts. This study aims to provide insights into the dynamics of language use in multilingual societies and strategies for local language preservation through community involvement and policies supporting the mother tongue's sustainability. In the future, researchers can explore how digital media can be used to preserve the Javanese language; in addition, researchers can develop strategies to integrate the Javanese language into the education curriculum to maintain the language. Researchers can focus on the impact of globalization, tourism, and urbanization on the use of the Javanese language, especially in the solo area.

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